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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
(An unpublished portrait)

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

BY

Isobel Strong

Joint Author with Lloyd Osbourne of
MEMORIES OF VAILIMA

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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THE CHILD

BEFORE R. L. S. was known to the world as a writer, the name of Stevenson called to mind the light-houses that guard the coast of Scotland and “open in the dusk their flowers of fire.” Twenty sentinels they stand, built upon rocks in the midst of angry seas, solidly defying the storms of the North while bearing mute testimony to the daring skill of their builders. It was from these brave men that Robert Louis Stevenson inherited his name and

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his courage. He wrote in "Under-woods":

"Say not of me that weakly I declined
The labours of my sires and fled the sea,
The towers we founded and the lamps we
lit,
To play at home with paper like a child.
But rather say: In the afternoon of time
A strenuous family dusted from its hands
The sand of granite, and beholding far
Along the sounding coast its pyramids
And tall memorials catch the dying sun,
Smiled well content, and to this childish
task
Around the fire addressed its evening
hours."

He "played with paper" to such good effect that now the name of Stevenson spells romance, courage against all odds, and the bright gospel of hope.

He was born in Edinburgh on the 13th of November, 1850, and chris-

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tened Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson. The spelling, but not the pronunciation, of his second name was changed later and the Balfour dropped.

The climate of his native land was a cruel one for a delicate child—or perhaps the climate made the child delicate. At any rate, the story of his early life would be sad reading were it not for the radiance of his spirit that glowed through the dull clouds of ill-health like a burning lamp. When he was five years old he was asked by his mother what he had been doing, and the answer is the key-note of his character: “I have been playing all day,” he said, “or at least I have been making myself cheerful.”

His eager eyes looked brightly

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through the mist of pain and found charm and interest in everything about him. Through his rose-coloured glasses the next-door garden was a foreign land; he heard galloping hoofs in the wind at night, and his sick-bed, touched by the magic of his fancy, changed to "The Pleasant Land of Counter-pane." "Once," he wrote, "as I lay playing hunter, hid in a thick laurel, and with a toy gun upon my arm, I worked myself so hotly into the spirit of the play that I think I can still see the herd of antelope come sweeping down the lawn and round the deodar — it was almost a vision."

In the evening, after dinner, one can imagine the "wee laddie" sitting by the fire, his head leaning on his hand, his eyes tightly shut, dreaming

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of fairy lands, of forests, and the
“rain-pool sea,” and then

“When my eyes I once again
Open and see all things plain,
High bare walls, great bare floor,
Great big knobs on drawer and door,
Great big people perched on chairs
Stitching tucks and mending tears,
Each a hill that I could climb
And talking nonsense all the time.

O dear me

That I could be

A sailor on the rain-pool sea,
A climber in the clover tree,
And just come back, a sleepy-head,
Late at night to go to bed.”

Mr. Stevenson explained to me once,
a little whimsically, that he wrote
his books with the faith of a child
playing a game. He believed his
characters were real people, and
saw them as clearly as the herd of

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antelope galloping across his grandfather's lawn. If he once discovered they were only pen-and-ink, his story would come to an end. He said "an author must live in a book as a child in a game, oblivious to the world." He had no patience with half-hearted people. Once while waiting in a drawing-room he saw a small boy playing boat on a sofa. The little man rowed and put up sail and hauled in imaginary ropes, and finally, tiring of the game, jumped off the make-believe craft and walked to the door. "Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Stevenson reproachfully. "For God's sake swim!"

Though little Louis was an only child, he had cousins, and they all, himself included, adored "Auntie," his mother's sister, Miss Balfour, of

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whom I quote this interesting description: — “I have mentioned my aunt. In her youth she was a wit and a beauty, very imperious, managing, and self-sufficient. But as she grew up she began to suffice for all family as well. An accident on horse-back made her nearly deaf and blind, and suddenly transformed this wilful empress into the most serviceable and amiable of women. There were thirteen of the Balfours as (oddly enough) there were of the Stevensons, and the children of the family came home to her to be nursed, to be educated, to be mothered, from the infanticidal climate of India. There must sometimes have been half-a-score of us children about the manse, and all were born a second time from Aunt Jane’s tenderness. It was strange

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when a new party of these sallow young folk came home, perhaps with an ayah. This little country manse was the centre of the world, and Aunt Jane represented Charity. The text, my mother says, must have been written for her and Aunt Jane: 'More are the children of the barren than the children of the married wife.' "

A happy day at the manse was too often followed by illness, and then Alison Cunningham cared for the sick boy. To her he wrote:

“For the long nights you lay awake
And watched for my unworthy sake:
For your most comfortable hand
That led me through the uneven land:
For all the story-books you read,
For all the pains you comforted:
For all you pitied, all you bore,
In sad and happy days of yore:—

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My second mother, my first wife,
The angel of my infant life—
From the sick child, now well and old,
Take, nurse, the little book you hold!

And grant it, Heaven, that all who read
May find as dear a nurse at need,
And every child who lists my rhyme
In the bright fireside nursery clime
May hear it in as kind a voice
As made my childish heart rejoice.”

In after years, whenever Stevenson spoke of his childhood, the sick-room, the wakeful nights, even the pain he suffered, served merely as a background to “Cummy’s” rare devotion. He was grateful to her all his life. He wrote letters to her, he sent her copies of all his books as they came out, he had her to stay with him in Bournemouth, and even proposed sending for her to pay a visit to Samoa. “Cummie was full of life and merri-

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ment.* She sang and danced to her boy and read to him most dramatically. She herself tells how, the last time she ever saw him, he said to her before a room full of people: 'It's you that gave me a passion for the drama, Cummie.' 'Me, Master Lou,' I said. 'I never put foot inside a play-house in all my life!' 'Ay, woman,' said he, 'but it was the grand dramatic way ye had of reciting the hymns!' "

Louis Stevenson was one of the few people who recall their early days. In a way he never outgrew them. Instead of passing through the phases of childhood and youth, he went on carrying them with him through life, growing richer with the years. In "A

* Writes Graham Balfour in "Life of Robert Louis Stevenson."

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Child's Garden" one sees how vividly he remembered, for that book was not written for children; it was the recollections of his own childhood put into verse:

“But do not think you can at all,
By knocking on the window, call
That child to hear you. He intent
Is all on his play-business bent.
He does not hear, he will not look,
Nor yet be lured out of this book.
For, long ago, the truth to say,
He has grown up and gone away,
And it is but a child of air
That lingers in the garden there.”

THE YOUTH

THOUGH Stevenson's parents were well to do and the lad was surrounded by every comfort and even luxury, the odds were against him. The climate of his native land was an impossible one, that made living in Edinburgh a constant fight for health; but his father would not forego his ambition to make his son a lighthouse engineer. The boy went obediently to Skerryvore, and the Bass Rock to inspect the construction of the works, bringing home, not technical knowledge, but romantic impressions that he used afterward in his books. "David Balfour's" de-

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scription of the old rock shows how clear some of them were. "The strange nature of this place, and the curiosities with which it abounded, held me busy and amused. . . . I . . . continually explored the surface of the isle wherever it might support the foot of man. The old garden of the prison was still to be observed, with flowers and pot-herbs running wild, and some ripe cherries on a bush. A little lower stood a chapel or a hermit's cell; who built or dwelt in it, none may know, and the thought of its age made a ground of many meditations. . . . There were times when I thought I could have heard the pious sound of psalms out of the martyr's dungeons, and seen the soldiers tramp the ramparts with their glinting pikes

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and the dawn rising behind them out of the North Sea.”

Thomas Stevenson took his son on many wild trips about the North Coast of Scotland, trying to interest him in the profession that was so dear to his own heart. Stevenson respected the work and admired his father's share of it, as we read in “Thomas Stevenson, Civil Engineer.”

“At this time his lights were in every part of the world, guiding the mariner; his firm were the consulting engineers to the Indian, the New Zealand, and the Japanese lighthouse boards, so that Edinburgh was a world centre for that branch of applied science; in Germany he had been called ‘the Nestor of lighthouse illumination’; even in France, where his claims were long denied,

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he was at last, on the occasion of the late exposition, recognised and medalled."

It must have needed a great deal of courage to tell such a man that his dearest hopes were to be dashed to the ground. Happily, the differences between father and son were of short duration, and they became in later years the best and closest of friends. The intense interest that Stevenson took in people, and life, and birds, and scenery, his constant scribbling in note-books, seemed to his father a waste of time. To the son, the study of lighthouse engineering became an impossibility, and he finally gave it up after an interview that must have been an exceedingly unhappy one for them both.

Colvin describes this period of the

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boy's life most vividly: "The ferment of youth was more acute and more prolonged in him than in most men of genius; and for several years he was torn hither and thither by fifty currents of speculation, impulse and desire. . . . I have tried to give some notion of the many various strains and elements which met in him and which were in these days pulling one against another in his half-formed being, at the great expense of spirit and body. Add the storms, which from time to time attacked him, of shivering repulsion from the climate and conditions of life in the city which he yet deeply and imaginatively loved. . . . the seasons of temptation most strongly besetting the ardent and poetic temperament to seek escape into freedom and the

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ideal through that grotesque back door opened by the crude allurements of the city streets; the moods of spiritual revolt against the harsh doctrine of the creed in which his parents were deeply and his father even passionately attached."

The sensitive lad battled gallantly with fate. "Does it not seem surprising," I quote from one of his youthful letters, "that I can keep the lamp alight through all this gusty weather in so frail a lantern? And yet it burns cheerily."

He took life, and his lessons, pain and play, changes from one school to another, lapses into illness and consequent travels on the continent, everything that came his way, in a spirit of intense appreciation and absorbed interest.

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None of the experiences of his youth were wasted or forgotten. From his hot-headed quarrels with his father he gathered the wisdom and insight to write "Crabbed Age and Youth," an essay that has helped many a parent to understand his son. His long tramps over the Scottish heather formed material for the most striking chapter in "Kidnapped." He paid a visit to an uncle in the parish of Stow on which he afterward drew in "Hermiston" for knowledge of the Lammermuirs. The happy adventurous days of his youth that he spent exploring the Edinburgh castle were minutely remembered and turned to good account in "St. Ives." He used the scenery of Brenner Pass, which he never saw after 1863, for the background of

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“Will o’ the Mill.” From his boyish resentment against the dogmas and narrow creed of his elders he evolved the broad, kindly tolerant, hopeful faith that inspired the “Prayers.”

Through the turbulent years of his youth Stevenson was sustained and upheld by a stout heart “radiating pure romance.” He was like the lad-die with a lantern under his coat in the game he described so well. “We wore them buckled to the waist upon a cricket belt, and over them, such was the rigour of the game, a buttoned topcoat. They smelled noisomely of blistered tin; they never burned aright though they always burned our fingers; their use was naught; the pleasure of them merely fanciful; and yet a boy with a bull’s eye under his topcoat asked for nothing more!”

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He was indeed a strange lad. The savour went out of life for him if he could “no longer see satyrs in the thicket, or picture a highwayman riding down the lane.” In that same essay, “A Retrospect,” he wrote: “*Et ego in Arcadia vixit* would be no empty boast upon my grave. If I desire to live long it is that I may have the more to look back upon.”

“All through my boyhood,” he explained, “I was known and pointed out for a pattern of an idler, and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny

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version book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words.”

THE MAN

WITH his heart set upon literature as a profession, scribbling every spare moment and writing an astonishing number of essays (they fill a large volume of the "Edinburgh Edition"), it must have been uphill work for Stevenson to put his mind upon engineering at all. However, he was so successful as to receive a medal for an invention of "A New Form of Intermittent Light" and was commended by the Royal Scottish Society of Arts for his paper on that subject.

When, in 1871, his father allowed him to abandon engineering, offering the law as a compromise, Louis fell

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upon the new drudgery with such studious fury that he was called to the Scottish bar in July, 1875. On the 25th he received his first complimentary brief and the next day he sailed for France. That his attitude of mind was well understood by his friends is shown by a letter from Fleeming Jenkin congratulating him, not upon entering a new profession, but on "getting rid of the law forever."

By this time the young man's essays were beginning to attract attention, enough, at any rate, for his father to feel justified in giving him an allowance with full permission to follow the art he loved. From that moment to the day of his death Stevenson devoted himself to literature with a passion and fervour that never failed. He had won out against all

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odds and though success came to him slowly it came surely. He who had defended idleness so valiantly knew himself when he said, "I have a goad in the flesh continually pushing me to work, work, work." He was never without a pencil and a notebook, never so happy as when in the full tide of a new story or novel. He loved the "ring of words" and the game of sorting and arranging them to fit the exact meaning of his mind. He turned to letter-writing as a skilled cabinet-maker might fashion an elegant toy—for the fun of using his tools skilfully. In long hours of sickness and enforced rest from serious work he scribbled verses to pass the time. He thought so little of these that "The Child's Garden of Verse" and "Underwoods" would not have

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been printed had not many a poem been rescued from the margins of magazines, the fly-leaves of books he was reading, and even the waste-paper basket.

He was very modest about his work and said of his first small success: "I begin to have more hope in the story line and that should improve my income." He laughed incredulously when a friend said to him, "I believe the day will come, Louis, when people will speak of 'Stevenson's Works.' " He lived long enough to hear the world ringing with his fame. When the "Edinburgh Edition" was in course of preparation he wrote to his old friend, Charles Baxter: "Do you remember—how many years ago I would be afraid to hazard a guess—one night when I communicated to

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you certain intimations of early death and aspirations after fame? . . . If any one at that moment could have shown me the 'Edinburgh Edition' I suppose I should have died. It is with gratitude and wonder that I consider 'the way in which I have been led.' Could a more presumptuous idea have occurred to us in those days when we used to search our pockets for coppers, too often in vain, and combine forces to produce the three-pence necessary for two glasses of beer, or wander down the Lothian Road without any, than that I should be strong and well at the age of forty-three in the island of Upolu, and that you should be at home bringing out the 'Edinburgh Edition'?"

At Vailima, where he lived the last four years of his life, the monthly

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mail brought up the mountain trail on a pack-saddle was overflowing with requests for his autograph, books from young authors begging for a word of approval from "the Master," and many letters from the brilliant and successful writers of the day, French, American, and English, praising his latest work and hailing him generously as the greatest of them all. The profession of letters is one that is singularly free from jealousy, as was shown, when an author began to make himself known, by the enthusiastic letters from fellow-writers calling Stevenson's attention to the new star on the horizon.

Stevenson fought against all odds for the wife of his choice as he had done for his profession. From the first moment he met, at the little village of

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Greze in the forest of Fontainebleau, “the woman for whom he was to dare so much, to receive in return* such entire devotion, and to leave in prose and verse, and in his uttered words to all his intimates, a tribute such as few women have been privileged to receive,” until their marriage in San Francisco three years later, he surmounted one obstacle after another. The last book he wrote [that was left unfinished by his sudden death] was dedicated “To my Wife.”

“I saw the rain falling and the rain-bow
drawn
On Lammermuir. Harkening, I heard
again
In my precipitous city beaten bells
Winnow the keen sea-wind. And here
afar,
Intent on my own race and place I wrote.

* W. H. Low, “A Chronicle of Friendships.”

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Take thou the writing; thine it is. For
who
Burnished the sword, blew on the drowsy
coal,
Held still the target higher; chary of praise
And prodigal of counsel—who but thou?
So now in the end; if this the least be
good,
If any deed be done, if any fire
Burn in the imperfect page, the praise be
thine.”

This is to the critic, in acknowledgment of her influence and help in his literary work.

To the wife he wrote:

“Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble-dew,
Steel true and blade straight
The great artificer made my mate.

Honor, anger, valor, fire,
A love that life could never tire,
Death quench, or evil stir
The mighty master gave to her.

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Teacher, tender comrade, wife,
A fellow farer true through life.
Heart whole and soul free,
The August Father gave to me.”

THE TRAVELLER

WHEN Stevenson found himself free to go where he would, he took the first road that offered—and it led him to France.

“Then follow you wherever lie
The travelling mountains of the sky
Or let the streams, in civil mode
Direct your choice upon the road.

For one and all, or high or low
Will lead you where you wish to go
And one and all go night and day
Over the hills and far away!”

He and his friend, Sir Walter Simpson, a young fellow of his own age, took a canoeing trip that he described afterward in “An Inland Voyage.”

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He enjoyed it all, good fortune and ill, wet and stormy days as well as fair, and only stopped to commiserate a poor fellow who had to stay behind. He was "the driver of the hotel omnibus; a mean enough looking little man, as well as I can remember; but with a spark of something human in his soul. He had heard of our little journey, and came to me at once in envious sympathy. How he longed to travel! he told me. How he longed to be somewhere else, and see the round world before he went to his grave! 'Here I am,' said he; 'I drive to the station. Well. And then I drive back again to the hotel. And so on every day and all the week round. My God, is that life!' I could not say I thought it was—for him. He pressed me to tell him where I had been and where

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I hoped to go; and as he listened I declare the fellow sighed. Might not this have been a brave African traveller, or gone to the Indies after Drake? But it is an evil age for the gipsily inclined among men. He who can sit squarest on a three-legged stool, he it is who has the wealth and glory."

After many days of adventure they came to "La Fere of Cursed Memory." Here they were taken for pedlars and refused a night's lodging, to Stevenson's fury. "For my part," he stormed, "when I was turned out of the Stag or the Hind, or whatever it was, I would have set the temple of Diana on fire if it had been handy. There was no crime complete enough to express my disapproval of human institutions." After wading about in

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the dark and rain for hours they found “La Croix de Malte,” where they were received. “Little did the Bazins know how much they served us. We were charged for candles, for food and drink, and for the beds we slept in. But there was nothing in the bill for the husband’s pleasant talk nor the pretty spectacle of their married life.” It is only by a letter to a friend that one learns of the risks he took with his health, and even that is written in a cheerful vein. “I have had to fight against pretty mouldy health, so that, on the whole, the essayist and reviewer has shown, I think, some pluck. Four days ago I was not a hundred miles from being miserably drowned, to the immense regret of a large circle of friends and the permanent impoverishment of British Essayism and

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Reviewery. My boat culbutted me under a fallen tree in a very rapid current; and I was a good while before I got on to the outside of that fallen tree, rather a better while than I cared about."

His next journey was afoot, his companion a donkey, "a love, price sixty-five francs and a glass of brandy." "His love" refused to move beyond a snail's pace until a passing peasant taught him the art of donkey driving and gave him the magic word "proot." "The rogue pricked up her ears and broke into a good round pace, which she kept up without flagging and without exhibiting the least symptoms of distress as long as the peasant kept beside us." When his preceptor left and they "started to climb an interminable hill upon the

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other side, 'proot' seemed to have lost its virtue. I prooted like a lion. I prooted mellifluously like a sucking dove; but Modestine would be neither softened nor intimidated. She held doggedly to her pace." Finally an innkeeper made Stevenson a goad and all went well. The innkeeper's wife understood the object of his journey perfectly. "She sketched at what I should put into my book when I got home. 'Whether people harvest or not in such and such a place; if there were forests; studies of names; what, for example, I and the Master of the house say to you; and the beauty of nature and all that.'" Such is the story of "Travels with a Donkey" done into perfect prose.

A far different journey was his next one, when he travelled as "An Ama-

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teur Emigrant to California Across the Plains." He knew France well, spoke the language fluently, and understood the customs of the people. The United States was a foreign land.

"With half a heart I wander here
As from an age gone by.
A brother—yet though young in years
An elder brother, I.

You speak another tongue than mine
Though both were English born—
I towards the night of time decline
You mount into the morn.

Youth shall grow great and strong and free
But age must still decay—
Tomorrow for the States—for me
England and yesterday!"

It was not until after ten years of increasing illness, after he had vainly sought health in Hyères, Davos-Platz, Bournemouth, and the Adi-

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rondacks, that Fate, suddenly relenting, sent him to the South Seas.

“By strange pathways God hath brought
you Tusitala.

In strange webs of fortune caught you.
Led you by strange moods and measures
To this paradise of pleasures.”*

It was indeed a paradise to Stevenson, a new world full of sunlight and warmth, romance, and strange adventure. “The first experience can never be repeated. The first love, the first sunrise, the first South Sea Island, are memories apart.” When his yacht, the *Casco*, plunged its anchor into the waters of Nuka-hiva Bay, “it was a small sound, a great event,” Stevenson wrote, “but my soul went down with these moorings

* Edmund Gosse in the dedication, “In Russet and Silver.”

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whence no windlass may extract or diver fish it up, and I, and some part of my ship's company were from that hour the bond slaves of the isles of Vivien."

After more than a year of voyaging among the islands he moored his bark on the shore of the most beautiful of them all, Upolu of the Samoan group. "For here," he declared, "if more days are granted me they shall be passed where I have found life most pleasant and man most interesting!"

THE WRITER

THE first of Stevenson's books to make a success was "Treasure Island." The idea of the story was suggested by a map which he drew for Lloyd Osbourne, his stepson, "a schoolboy home from the holidays and much in need of something craggy to break his mind upon." "He had no thought of literature; it was the art of Raphael that received his fleeting suffrages; . . . I would sometimes unbend a little, join the artist (so to speak) at the easel, and pass the afternoon with him in a generous emulation, making coloured drawings. On one of these occasions,

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I made the map of an island; it was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and, with the unconsciousness of the predestined, I ticketed my performance ‘Treasure Island.’” He was soon at work writing out a list of chapters. “It was to be a story for boys; no need for psychology or fine writing; and I had a boy at hand to be a touchstone. . . . I had counted on one boy, I found I had two in my audience. My father caught fire at once with all the romance and childishness of his original nature. . . . When the time came for Billy Bones’s chest to be ransacked, he must have passed the better part of a day preparing, on the back of a legal envel-

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ope, an inventory of its contents, which I exactly followed; and the name of 'Flint's old ship'—the *Walrus*—was given at his particular request."

"Treasure Island" was dedicated to

LLOYD OSBOURNE,

An American Gentleman,

In accordance with whose classic taste
The following narrative has been designed.
It is now in return for numerous delightful
hours

And with the kindest wishes dedicated

By his affectionate friend,

The Author.

Prince Otto surrounded by his charming court, in the midst of romance, mystery, and intrigue, was the first modern novel laid in an imaginary kingdom; it has been so widely imitated, that one loses the effect of originality which so startled

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its first readers. Stevenson said of this book, in a rather mocking humour: "It is queer and a little, little bit free; and some of the parties are immoral, and the whole thing is not a romance, nor yet a comedy; nor yet a romantic comedy; but a kind of preparation of some of the element of all three in a glass jar." But, all the same, in another letter he wrote: "A brave story, I swear, and a brave play, too, if we can find the trick to make the end." And his heart warms to his hero, "my poor, clever, feather-headed Prince whom I love already." He worked hard over the book, describing it as "a strange example of the difficulty of being ideal in an age of realism."

There is a beautiful passage in "Prince Otto" that is often quoted.

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The Princess had been wandering in the woods all night. "At last she began to be aware of a wonderful revolution, compared to which the fire of Mitt Walden Palace was but the crack and flash of a percussion-cap. The countenance with which the pines regarded her began insensibly to change; the grass, too, short as it was, and the whole winding staircase of the brook's course, began to wear a solemn freshness of appearance. And this slow transfiguration reached her heart, and played upon it, and transpierced it with a serious thrill. She looked all about; the whole face of nature looked back, brimful of meaning, finger on lip, leaking its glad secret. She looked up. Heaven was almost emptied of stars. Such as still lingered shone with a changed

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and waning brightness, and began to faint in their stations.

“And the colour of the sky itself was the most wonderful; for the rich blue of the night had now melted and softened and brightened; and there had succeeded in its place a hue that has no name, and that is never seen but as the herald of the morning. ‘O,’ she cried, joy catching at her voice; ‘O it is the dawn!’ ”

Stevenson was in Saranac when the idea came to him for the story of “The Master of Ballantrae.” “It was winter, the night was very dark; the air extraordinarily clear and cold, and sweet with the purity of forests.” He had been reading the “Phantom Ship.” “‘Come,’ said I to my engine; ‘let us make a tale, a story of many years and countries, of the sea and the

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land, savagery and civilisation.’” He tells us that “On such a fine frosty night, with no wind and the thermometer below zero, the brain works with much vivacity; and the next moment I had seen the circumstance transplanted from India and the tropics to the Adirondack wilderness and the stringent cold of the Canadian border.”

In the dedication to Sir Percy and Lady Shelley he tells the strange story of its writing: “Here is a tale which extends over many years and travels into many countries. By a peculiar fitness of circumstance the writer began, continued it, and concluded it among distant and divers scenes. Above all, he was much upon the sea. The character and fortune of the fraternal enemies, the hall and shrub-

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bery of Durrisdeer, the problem of MacKellars homespun and how to shape it for superior flights; these were his company on deck in many star reflecting harbours, ran often in his mind at sea to the tune of slatting canvas, and were dismissed (something of the suddenest) on the approach of squalls. It is my hope that these surroundings of its manufacture may to some degree find favour for my story with sea-farers and sea-lovers like yourselves.

“And at least here is a dedication from a great way off; written by the loud shores of a subtropical island near upon ten thousand miles from Boscombe Chine and Manor; scenes which rise before me as I write along with the faces and voices of my friends.”

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The list of his complete writings would be a long one, including as they do, the wide range of essays, fables, critical reviews, plays, travels, romances, memoirs, verses, and novels.

The book that made the greatest sensation, that sold forty thousand copies in England and over a quarter of a million in America, is "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." It is an allegory written in the form of a story that has been played in theatres and preached in churches. A slim book in size but great in power, that leaves the reader thrilled with horror, not only at the monster Hyde but at the possibilities of evil in one's own heart.

THE TEACHER

STEVENSON was one of the first to teach the optimistic doctrine of life. "The disease of pessimism," he declared, "springs never from real troubles, which it braces a man to bear, which it delights men to bear well. Nor does it readily spring at all in minds that have conceived of life as a field of ordered duties not as a chase in which to hunt for gratifications."

He upheld "gentleness and cheerfulness, these come before all morality; they are the perfect duties. If your morals make you dreary depend upon it they are wrong. I do not say 'give them up,' for they may be all you

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have; but conceal them like a vice, lest they should spoil the lives of better and simpler people."

"Noble disappointment, noble self-denial are not to be admired, not soon to be pardoned if they bring bitterness." "Nature is a good guide through life, and the love of simple pleasures next, if not superior to, virtue."

"There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy. By being happy we sow anonymous benefits upon the world, which remain unknown even to ourselves, or when they are disclosed, surprise nobody so much as the benefactor."

"A happy man or woman is a better thing to find than a five-pound note. He or she is a radiating focus of goodwill; and their entrance into a room

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is as though another candle had been lighted." These are inspiring words, and they go far and sink deep coming from a man like Stevenson whose pulpit was a sick-bed; who had linked arms with Pain and smiled in the face of Death. He encouraged you "by all means to finish your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year; even if he hesitates about a month, make a brave push and see what can be accomplished in a week. It is not only in finished undertakings that we ought to honour useful labour. A spirit goes out of the man who means execution which outlives the most untimely ending. All who have meant good work with their whole hearts have done good work although they may die before they have time to sign it. Every heart that has beat strong

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and cheerfully has left a hopeful impulse behind it in the world and bettered the traditions of mankind.”

“To be honest, to be kind, to earn a little and spend a little less, to make upon the whole a family happier for his presence, to renounce, when that shall be necessary and not to be embittered, to keep a few friends, but these without capitulation—above all, on the same grim conditions, to keep friends with himself—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy.” “*Etre et pas avoir* to be not to possess—that is the problem of life. To be wealthy a rich nature is the first requisite, and money but the second. To be of a quick and healthy blood, to share in all honourable curiosities, to be rich in admiration and free from envy, to

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rejoice greatly in the good of others, to live with such generosity of heart that your love is still a dear possession in absence or unkindness—these are the gifts of fortune which money cannot buy and without which money can buy nothing.”

He tells us that “a man is not to expect happiness, only to profit by it gladly when it shall arise; he is on duty here; he knows not how or why, and does not need to know; he knows not for what hire, and must not ask. Somehow or other, though he does not know what goodness is, he must try to be good; somehow or other, though we cannot tell what will do it, he must try to give happiness to others.”

“Mankind is not only the whole in general, but every one in particular.

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Every man or woman is one of mankind's dear possessions; to his or her just brain, and kind heart, and active hands, mankind intrusts some of its hopes for the future; he or she is a possible well-spring of good acts and source of blessings to the race."

He does not preach only to the wise or the clever or the great; he declares that "the man who has his heart on his sleeve, and a good whirling weathercock of a brain, who reckons his life as a thing to be dashingly used and cheerfully hazarded, makes a very different acquaintance of the world, keeps all his pulses going true and fast, and gathers impetus as he runs, until, if he be running towards anything better than wildfire, he may shoot up and become a constellation in the end." And then "when the

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time comes that he should go there need be few illusions left about himself. Here lies one who meant well, tried a little, failed much;—surely that may be his epitaph, of which he need not be ashamed, nor will he complain at the summons which calls a defeated soldier from the field; defeated, ay, if he were Paul or Marcus Aurelius!—but, if there is still one inch of fight in his old spirit, undishonoured. The faith which sustained him in his lifelong blindness and lifelong disappointment will scarce even be required in this last formality of laying down his arms. Give him a march with his old bones; there, out of the glorious sun coloured earth, out of the day and dust and the ecstasy—there goes another Faithful Failure!”

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“If I have faltered more or less
In my great task of happiness;
If I have moved among my race
And shown no glorious morning face;
If beams from happy human eyes
Have moved me not; if morning skies,
Books and my food, and summer rain
Knocked on my sullen heart in vain;—
Lord, Thy most pointed pleasure take
And stab my spirit broad awake;
Or, Lord, if too obdurate I,
Choose Thou, before that spirit die,
A piercing pain, a killing sin,
And to my dead heart run them in!”

THE FRIEND

STEVENSON had the gift of making friends, for “there was that about him,” says Graham Balfour, “that he was the only man I have ever known who possessed charm in high degree, whose character did not suffer from the possession. The gift comes naturally to women, and they are at their best in its exercise. But a man requires to be of a very sound fibre before he can be entirely himself and keep his heart single, if he carries about with him a talisman to obtain from all men and all women the object of his heart’s desire. Both gifts Stevenson possessed, not only the magic but also

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the strength of character to which it was safely intrusted."

That he was utterly unconscious of possessing any such attribute is shown by a fragment written in his youth, describing the three wishes of his heart: "First, good health; secondly, a small competence; thirdly, *O du Lieber Gott* friends!" They came in answer to that call by the thousands, many of them his readers who had never known the man Stevenson. Even his intimate and personal friends were many, from all walks in life, rich and poor, philosopher and fisherman, white and brown. It is not surprising that he should have had such friends as Sidney Colvin, professor of arts; Edmund Gosse, poet; Will H. Low, painter, and nearly all the prominent writers of his day, but



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every one who ever came in contact with him, man or woman, that person was his friend for life, even imitating his mannerisms and tricks of speech—his landladies, bell-boys, hotel porters, innkeepers.

It was at Monterey that he first met Simoneau. In “the old Pacific capital,” he said, “of all my private collection of remembered inns and restaurants—and I believe it, others things being equal, to be unrivalled—one particular house of entertainment stands forth alone. I am grateful, indeed, to many a swinging sideboard, to many a dusty wine-bush; but not with the same kind of gratitude. Some were beautifully situated, some had an admirable table, some were the gathering places of excellent companions; but take them for all in all, not one

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can be compared with Simoneau's at Monterey."

Stevenson was taken ill there and the Frenchman visited and befriended him, "a most pleasant old boy with whom I discuss the universe and play chess daily." In after years, as each of his books came out, a copy with an inscription was sent to Simoneau till the old man had a complete set of first editions, besides many letters and photographs. His restaurant had failed, and he supported himself by selling "tamales" on the street, and though he was offered a very handsome sum of money for his Stevenson books and letters he refused to part with them. Mrs. Stevenson, in grateful recognition of the old man's loyalty, was able to make his declining years comfortable, hastened to his

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bedside when he died, and erected a handsome tombstone to his memory.

Every doctor who ever attended Stevenson became his friend; to his admiration of the medical practitioner and his personal gratitude we owe the beautiful dedication to "Underwoods" that begins:

"There are men and classes of men that stand above the common herd; the soldier, the sailor, and the shepherd not unfrequently; the artist rarely; rarelier still, the clergyman; the physician almost as a rule. He is the flower (such as it is) of our civilisation. . . . Generosity he has, such as is possible to those who practice an art, never to those who drive a trade; discretion, tested by a hundred secrets; tact, tried in a thousand embarrassments; and, what are more im-

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portant, Herculean cheerfulness and courage. So it is that he brings air and cheer into the sick-room, and often enough, though not so often as he wishes, brings healing.”

Tembinok, the last King of the Gilbert Islands, was a friend for whom Stevenson had a profound admiration. He describes their leave-taking in his South Sea book: “As the time came for our departure Tembinok became greatly changed; a softer, more melancholy, and, in particular, a more confidential man appeared in his stead. To my wife he contrived laboriously to explain that though he knew he must lose his father in the course of nature, he had not minded nor realised it till the moment came; and now that he was to lose us, he repeated the experience. . . . ‘I very

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sorry you go,' he said at last. 'Miss Stlevens he good man, woman he good man, boy he good man; all good man. Woman he smart all same man. My woman,' glancing toward his wives, 'he good woman no very smart. I think Miss Stlevens he big chiep all the same cap'n man-o'-war. I think Miss Stlevens he rich man all same me. All go schoona. I very sorry. My patha he go, my uncle he go, my cutcheons he go, Miss Stlevens he go: all go. You no see King cry before. King all the same man; feel bad, he cry. I very sorry.' "

On one of the South Sea voyages Stevenson and his party were detained at a native village two months. The Chief, Ori a' Ori, sent a farewell letter when they left that "as for me," Stevenson said, "I would rather have

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received it than written ‘Redgauntlet’ or the ‘Sixth Æneid.’ ” This is the translation:

“I make you to know my great affection. At the hour when you left us, I was filled with tears; my wife, Rui Telime, also, and all of my household. When you embarked I felt a great sorrow. It is for this that I went upon the road, and you looked from that ship, and I looked at you on the ship with great grief until you had raised the anchor and hoisted the sails. When the ship started I ran along the beach to see you still; and when you were on the open sea I cried out to you, ‘Farewell, Louis,’ and when I was coming back to my house I seemed to hear your voice crying, ‘Rui, farewell.’ Afterward I watched

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the ship as long as I could until the night fell, and when it was dark I said to myself, 'If I had wings I should fly to the ship.' I will not forget you in my memory. Here is the thought. I desire to meet you again. It is my dear Teriitera (Stevenson) makes the only riches I desire in this world. It is your eyes I desire to see again. It must be that your body and my body shall eat together at one table; there is what would make my heart content. But now we are separated. May God be with you all. May His word and His mercy go with you, so that you may be well and we also, according to the words of Paul.

“ORI A' ORI.”

I have not the space to tell the story of the Princess Moe of Tahiti, of

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Tati Salmon with whom Stevenson made brothers in the island fashion, of the beautiful Princess Kaiulani that he knew "in the April of her age and at Waikiki within easy walk of Kaiulani's banyan," of the French fisherman of Monterey whom he met at Marseilles after many years and entertained at his hotel, of Mother Mary Anne of saintly memory, of the blind white leper at Molokai, of the Captains and Supercargoes of the many ships on which he sailed, of mad, handsome, romantic "Tin Jack," original of "Tommy Haddon" in "The Wrecker"; of the Missionaries, Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, and Wesleyan, for these are a few only of the many friends of him who said, "If we find but one to whom we can speak out of our heart

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freely, with whom we can walk in love and simplicity without dissimulation, we have no ground of quarrel with the world or God.”

THE POET

STEVENSON was not only able to express his thoughts in beautiful language, he was born with a poet's soul, and nature spoke to him as to an intimate. Of a pleasant French landscape he wrote: "From time to time a warm wind rustled down the valley and set all the chestnuts dangling their branches of foliage and fruit; the ear was filled with rustling music and the shadows danced in tune."

A passing phase of beatitude brought forth this charming explanation: "some thoughts, which sure would be the most beautiful, vanish before we can rightly scan their

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faces; as though a God travelling
by our green highways should but
ope the door, give one smiling look
into the house, and go again forever.
Was it Apollo, Mercury, or Love
with folded wings? Who shall say?
But we go the lighter about our busi-
ness and feel peace and pleasure in
our heart."

He found exquisite beauty in

"Every fairy wheel and thread
Of cobweb dew—bediamonded,"

and frosts that

"enchant the pool
And make the cart-ruts beautiful."

To him the world was full of ro-
mance. It was his birthright

"to hear
The great bell beating far and near—

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The odd unknown, enchanted gong
That on the road hales men along.
That from the mountain calls afar,
That lures the vessel from a star
And with a still aerial sound
Makes all the earth enchanted ground.”

The little verses from “A Child’s Garden” brighten many of the school books in England and America with their pleasant lessons of happiness in simple things:

“How do you like to go up in a swing
Up in the air so blue?
Oh I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!”

and such gentle admonitions as—

“A child should always say what’s true
And speak when he is spoken to,
And behave mannerly at table;
At least as far as he is able.”

For the comfort of sick children

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there was never anything more brave
and beautiful than

“The Land of Counterpane.”

And all of us, old and young, are better for the motto that hangs in many a nursery, sewing-room, office, and workshop:

“The World is so full of a number of things
I am sure we should all be as happy as
kings.”

The “Ballads,” that include many of the legends of Tahiti done into verse, was dedicated to the Chief Ori a’ Ori:

“Ori my brother in the island mode,
In every tongue and meaning much my
friend,
This story of your country and your clan,
In your loved house, your too much honoured guest,

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I made in English. Take it, being done;
And let me sign it with the name you gave,
Teritera."

In "Underwoods" many of his best and most serious poems are found both in Scotch and English; but in "Songs of Travel" Stevenson touches a gayer, lighter note that breathes of returning health and the salt sea breezes.

"I will make you brooches and toys for
your delight
Of bird-song at morning and star-shine
at night.

I will make a palace, fit for you and me,
Of green days in forests and blue days at
sea.

I will make my kitchen, and you shall keep
your room

Where white flows the river and bright
blows the broom,

And you shall wash your linen and keep
your body white

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In rainfall at morning and dew-fall at
night.

And this shall be for music when no one
else is near

The fine song for singing, the rare song to
hear:

That only I remember, that only you ad-
mire

Of the broad road that stretches and the
road-side fire."

Many of the verses in "The Child's
Garden" and "Songs of Travel"
have been set to music:

"Bright is the ring of words
When the right man rings them.
Fair the fall of songs
When the singer sings them.

Still they are carolled and said—
On wings they are carried—
After the singer is dead
And the maker buried.

Low as the singer lies
In the field of heather,

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Songs of his fashion bring
The swains together.

And when the west is red
With the sunset embers,
The lover lingers and sings
And the maid remembers.”

THE CHIEF

AFTER more than ten years of the sick-room, his "horizon four walls," it is not strange that Stevenson should have loved Samoa, where he found comparative health and was able to live out-of-doors. His letters to his friends were enthusiastic. "I wouldn't change my present installation for any post, dignity, honour, or advantage conceivable to me. It fills the bill. I have the loveliest time." "This is a hard and interesting and beautiful life we lead now." "Our fine days are certainly fine like Heaven; such a blue of the sea, such green of the trees, and such crimson of the hibiscus flowers you

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never saw; and the air as mild and gentle as a baby's breath—and yet not hot." "The sea, the islands, the islanders, the island life and climate make and keep me truly happier."

To his old friend Colvin he wrote: "After breakfast I rode home. Conceive such an outing, remember the pallid brute that lived in Skerryvore like a weevil in a biscuit, and receive the intelligence that I was rather the better for my journey. Twenty miles ride, sixteen fences taken, ten of the miles in a drenching rain, seven of them fasting and in the morning chill, and six stricken hours' political discussion by an interpreter; to say nothing of sleeping in a native house at which many of our litterati would have looked askance in itself."

In a speech to an assemblage of

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Samoan chiefs Stevenson said: "I love Samoa and her people. I love the land. I have chosen it to be my home while I live and my grave after I am dead, and I love the people and have chosen them to be my people to live and die with."

He bought a tract of land, built a large house which he furnished from his old home in Bournemouth and his father's place in Edinburgh, gathered his family about him, and lived like a country gentleman with many horses, a dairy, vegetable gardens, acres of pineapples, bananas and cacao, the grounds laid out with tennis courts and beautified by tropical trees and flowers. One of his prayers breathes the atmosphere of Vailima. "We thank Thee for this place in which we dwell; for the love that

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unites us; for the peace accorded us this day; for the hope with which we expect the morrow; for the health, the work, the food, and bright skies that make our lives delightful; for our friends in all parts of the earth and our friendly helpers in this foreign isle. Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind. Spare to us our friends, soften to us our enemies. Bless us, if it may be, in all our innocent endeavours. If it may not, give us the strength to encounter that which is to come, that we be brave in peril, constant in tribulation, temperate in wrath, and in all changes of fortune, and down to the gates of death, loyal and loving, one to another."

He described the house in one of his letters as "three miles from town,

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in the midst of great silent forests. There is a burn close by, and when we are not talking you can hear the burn, and the birds, and the sea breaking on the coast three miles away and six hundred feet below us."

Stevenson worked in the mornings, usually by dictation, which made his correspondence and novels much less trying to his strength. He was deeply interested in the government of the country and outlined a policy that has since been adopted with success by the Germans in their occupation of Upolu and Savaii. He rode a good deal on his brown horse, Jack, and was one of the "hounds" in a cross-country paper chase; he paid visits to the other islands, studied the Samoan language, read until late nearly every night, and often at-

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tended the entertainments given by the men-of-war or townspeople at the Apia Public Hall, where he joined in the dance which he described as “a most fearful and wonderful quadrille; I don’t know where the devil they fished it from, but it is rackets and prancing and embraciatory beyond words; perhaps it is best defined in Haggard’s expression as a gambado.”

Stevenson had been shut in from the world for so many weary years that he loved to keep open house; Vailima was the scene of numerous entertainments, balls, dinners, tennis parties on the lawn, and no holiday, English, American, or Samoan, was allowed to pass without an appropriate celebration.

At Christmas time the house would

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be filled with guests for several days, dancing, playing charades and games, and there was always an old-fashioned Christmas tree loaded with gifts. The first cotillon ever seen in Samoa was held at Vailima in honour of Washington's birthday. There was a dinner to all the English officers and officials in town on the occasion of Queen Victoria's jubilee. The thirteenth of November, the anniversary of Stevenson's birth, was celebrated by a grand feast given in the native fashion, the chiefs and their families arriving early in the day with presents of turtles, kava root, fans, model canoes, rings, live pigs carried on poles, and rolls of tapa and fine mats.

The midshipmen and officers of the men-of-war in port, the various offi-

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cials of England, Germany and the United States, the missionaries and their wives, the Samoan chiefs with their families and retainers, passing tourists, even the sailors on their liberty day ashore, all found a welcome at Vailima.

He who said "it is better to lose life like a spendthrift than to waste it like a miser. It is better to live and be done with it than die daily in the sick-room" was spared the horror of a lingering illness.

In the best health he had ever enjoyed; in the midst of his work on "Weir of Hermiston," that he believed to be his masterpiece, with those he loved most around him, his plans laid for weeks ahead, in the fulness of his powers, in the forty-fourth year of his age, the end came

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suddenly and painlessly by a stroke of apoplexy.

He died at ten minutes past eight on Monday evening the third of December, 1894.

He lay as though asleep, on a narrow couch in the middle of the great hall. The Union Jack that flew above Vailima was lowered and draped over the body. All through the night, as the sad news spread about the island, parties of Samoans came to pay their last respects to the truest friend they had ever known.

He had chosen Mount Vaia to be his last resting-place; the pathway up the steep hillside through the jungle was cut in the night by forty loyal Samoans, and on the morning of the fourth he was laid to rest.

“Nothing more picturesque can be

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imagined* than the narrow ledge that forms the summit of Mount Vaia, a place no wider than a room and flat as a table. On either side the land descends precipitately; in front lie the vast ocean and the surf-swept reefs; to the right and left green mountains rise, densely covered with the primeval forest." On this spot the tomb was built that took several months in the making; it is of solid blocks of cement welded together in a noble design with two large bronze tablets let in on either side. One bears the inscription in Samoan, "The resting place of 'Tusitala," followed by the quotation (in the same language), "'Thy country shall be my country and thy God my God." On the other

* Lloyd Osbourne in "A Letter to Mr. Stevenson's Friends."

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side are the name and dates and the requiem:

“Under the wide and starry sky
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.
This be the verse you grave for me:
‘Here he lies where he longed to be.
Home is the sailor home from the sea
And the hunter home from the hill.’”



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